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Toward a Rationale for Team Teaching

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The continuing interest and enthusiasm of administrators for adding to the variety of practices that have been tried in the name of team teaching has obscured the lack of theory necessary to an understanding, control, and prediction of the team process. As it becomes apparent that team teaching is not a panacea, useful gimmick, or bright new administrative ploy, the need for a theoretical base from which to derive and test innovations in school organization is being recognized. Setting up teams of teachers tinkers with the basic organizational structure of the school. Extensive team organization affects authority, status, and power relations; the system of motivation and rewards; the allocation of the basic instructional functions, and the role of the principal and the teacher. Unless these factors are considered in the development of teacher teams they may create more problems than they solve.

Effective planning and organizing for team teaching must be based upon some guiding framework or rationale. In this article a number of definitions and concepts are brought together which could be useful in planning for team teaching. They form a rationale which is only one of a number that can be proposed and are offered with the understanding that neither theories of organization nor principles of practice have been developed to a point where a theory of team teaching may be rigorously defined.

Definition of "Team"

The word "team" suggests a type of working relationship among individuals that does not presently exist in most schools. The nature of this relationship requires some arbitrary definition if a useful distinction is to be made between teams and other forms of cooperative working relationships between members of the school staff. It is based on the assumption that one of the major functions of teaching is the control and direction of the necessary and sufficient variables that form or directly influence the teaching-learning process.

A team relationship occurs when a group of teachers and students, as an organized unit, accept and carry out decision-making responsibility for a set of instructional variables such as time, space, group size, group composition, teacher assignment, and resource allocation. In addition to the variables normally under control of the teacher, the team unit permits delegation to the instructional team of decisions usually made by the principal and the use of variables not present in the smaller, single teacher-class unit of organization. The value of team teaching will be determined by the extent to which team organization permits effective coordination of a larger number of variables important to the achievement of higher levels of teacher and student performance.

Teaching and Instruction

In developing the rationale it is important to make a distinction between teaching and instruction. Teaching may be defined as the face-to-face relation-

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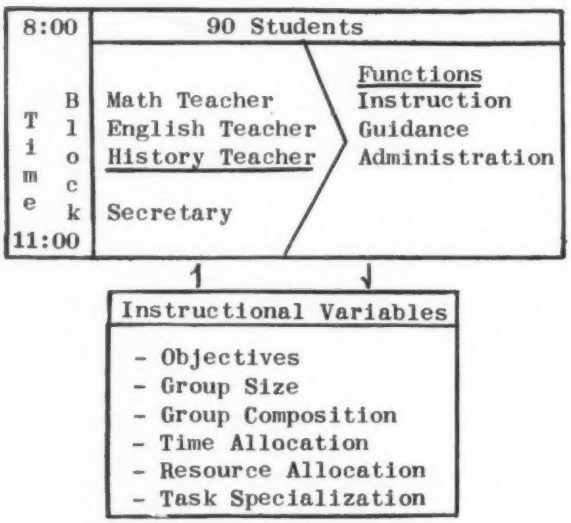
ship between teacher and student characterized by conversation or discourse which is directed toward the achievement of subject-matter objectives and school goals. Teaching is one of the processes of instruction.

Instruction may be defined as the transmission and storage of knowledge and culture with or without the direct mediation of the teacher. As a result of the progress in educational technology, the instructional process no longer depends upon the face-to-face interaction between teacher and student. Instruction through books, films, and television are the obvious examples of the wide range of instructional media that contribute to the educational process.

This distinction between teaching and instruction has implications for the way in which teams may be organized. A team organized according to this instructional concept would have a broad scope designed to include all the instructional variables such as teachers, students, instructional media, non-teaching personnel, and non-instructional tasks.

The following is an illustration of a teaching team organized around the instructional concept.



Specialization and Subdivision of Tasks

An effective team organization requires that a distinction be made between specialization and subdivision of tasks.[1] This distinction may help in selecting appropriately qualified personnel needed to staff the instructional team.

Task specialization may be made on the basis of functional roles, individual talents, or subject-matter content and method. To achieve task specialization, role functions such as coordinator, disciplinarian, confidante, evaluator, and diagnostician may be distributed among the members of the team. Individual attributes such as skill in making graphic materials, ability to give an effective performance for large audiences, empathetic understanding in face-to-face relationships, and attention to detail may be used in determining task assignments. Special training and competence in some aspect of a subject, direct experience in a problem area, discussion leader training, and other forms of technical competence may be used in selecting team members for a particular teaching assignment.

Task subdivision is based on the assumption that all tasks can be divided into objective, relatively simple component parts. Subdivision tasks are easily learned and require less training and educational background. Task subdivision in schools may be seen in such arrangements as teacher aide, lay reader, teaching intern, and secretarial help.

Team organization may include both forms of task division. However, the nature and operation of the team will vary with the extent to which task division is used. The underlying issue continues to be whether the present concept of the unity of the teaching function, as practiced in the single teacher-class unit of organization, is more or less productive than the specialization and subdivision of an instructional team.

Coordination and Control

Specialization of tasks, functions, and jobs tends to pull the organization apart and to split the central unity of the teaching process. At the same time it creates an automatic dependence that may have a unifying influence on the organization. The articulation of these two apparently conflicting forces is achieved through a form of unit organization in which responsibility for decision-making in areas in which specialization has occurred is delegated to the instructional team. Members of the team are responsible for decisions in areas for which they have necessary information, training, and experience. Coordinative responsibility for increases in specialization of task and function is shifted from the principal to the team. Planning for team oper-

ation must consider a necessary obligation of authority and responsibility to the team if it is to function effectively.

The Problem of Complexity

A team can be categorized along a simple to a complex continuum, depending on the nature and scope of the instructional variables for which it is responsible. The problem of complexity and the limits within which the team will be expected to work needs to be considered. The more complex the unit, the greater the necessity for change in the authority, power, and status relations in the school. A complex instructional team which may include a coordinator, teachers from two or more subject fields, nonteaching assistants, a large group of students, an extended block of time, a build-up of technological devices and supporting materials, a flexible physical setting, and guidance and administrative responsibilities, seriously affects the normal pattern of school operation. Such an instructional team can effect changes in the role of the student, the teacher, and the principal, as well as the system of reward, motivation, and communication.

Complexity has its organizational costs and raises the issue of whether more extensive control over a larger number of instructional variables is more productive for a given input than the simpler, more loosely organized patterns of instruction. Planning for the development of an instructional team must be done within a strategy and a consideration of the total school organization.

Team Structure

The questions that follow are those about which planning decisions need to be made. Although many others may be asked, these are basic to the development of an instructional team. Because a discussion on one question affects decision on the others, the relationship between the questions as well as the questions themselves must be a part of the planning process.

1. What should be the size of the instructional team staff?

2. What should be the size of the student group for whom the instructional staff will plan and be held accountable?

3. To what extent should the student group include more than one grade level?

4. Should the scope of the team unit be limited to one subject or should it include several subjects?

5. How large a block of time should be allocated to the team unit?

6. What kind of special facilities and resources will the instructional team require?

7. How should power, authority, and status relationships be defined in the team organizations?

8. To what extent should the team be responsible for the administrative functions of teachers?

9. To what extent should the team be responsible for the guidance functions expected of teachers?

Criterion Goals and Policies

After an instructional team has been formed, it must have criterion goals to decide on productive combinations of staff, students, time, space, and resources. The development of criterion goals, defined in behavioral terms, is essential to the control and the direction of the instructional variables for which the team is responsible, and should be developed before an instructional team takes on the responsibility for a group of students.

In addition, the team needs to develop a set of working policies and rules that will guide the planning process and resolve the inevitable disagreements. These should be in written form and subject to revision by the team members so that each teacher has some recourse when the operation of the unit demands too much conformity. In giving up some degree of individual autonomy for team conformity, team members need assurance of control over what is essentially a more demanding work situation.

An Application of the Rationale

A set of elements of team organization has been described which gives form to the instructional team unit of organization. Its usefulness may be tested by applying the team model to a current problem in education. Fritz[2] has brought to light the problem of fitting organizational technology into current organization of educational programs. The instructional team unit may provide one way of assimilating the contributions of technology in its complementary[3] role without undue internal disturbance. In fact, past summaries of team-teaching projects have suggested that team effec-

tiveness and efficiency are related to the extent to which there has been a build-up and use of communications technology.[4]

Both the supplementary and complementary roles of audio-visual media can best be exploited through the opportunities for flexible grouping provided by the size of the instructional unit. Film, television, and other devices may be more efficiently used in large groups. The effective use of stored and programmed instruction permits students "free access" to these resources. The task, group, and schedule flexibility of an instructional team makes it possible for individual students to select, pace, and order much of their own learning through the use of a wide range of storage and transmission media. When the comparative and absolute advantages of technical devices are fully exploited, students will be responsible for a larger share of their instruction and teachers will have more time for critical and continuing inquiry.

The need for analysis, allocation, and appraisal of the technical and content elements of the new media contributes to the problems of specialization and coordination. If the complementary role of technology is to be effectively integrated into the instructional program, the facilitating decisions must be made at a level and in a context that gives optimum control over the deployment of related variables. The rationale suggests that the instructional team unit has the authority, information, experience, and responsibility needed for co-opting the full potential of technology.

Do We Have the Answer?

Enthusiasm for new ideas and innovative practices should not gloss over the problem and difficulties involved in the use of instructional teams. The assumption that a teaching team can achieve a result greater than that which will be achieved by each member of the team working alone is unsupported at the present time. After summarizing a number of descriptive reports of team-teaching projects, Cunningham concluded that there is little evidence for expecting that teaching teams will increase pupil achievement.[5]

Teachers who have been members of instructional teams have raised a number of important questions and issues. Is the time and energy required to coordinate and control the variables for which the instructional team is responsible worth the possible effect of these variables on student achievement? Is the success of team operation dependent upon congruent value systems and compatible personality characteristics of its members? Should teams be formed hierarchically with an appointed leader, or should a team be federally organized with each member having equal status and decision-making responsibility?

The value of the team experience, as reported by teachers,[6] seems to be primarily one of professional growth and stimulation. The need to define and agree on goals needed for making decisions on grouping, scheduling, task specialization, and the like tends to result in a more sophisticated approach to curriculum and instruction. The opportunity for feedback from one's colleagues regarding role performance meets a need for a continuing professional evaluation that can not be had when teachers are isolated from other adults, as is characteristic of the typically organized school. The level of professional performance may be raised through increased responsibility for and control over influential instructional variables. As a form of in-service training, the instructional team may well have few peers.

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[1] The distinction between specialization and subdivision is discussed in Robert Dubin, *The World of Work* (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1959).

[2] John Fritz, "Educational Technology: A Way to its Assessment," *Administrator's Notebook*, Vol. IX, No. 6 (February, 1961).

[3] Complementary role refers to the use of a technological device in place of the teacher when such a device can perform at least as effectively as the teacher. Supplementary role refers to the use of a technological device only when the teacher in person cannot perform the task himself; *ibid.*

[4] NASSP, "Seeking Improved Learning Opportunities," *Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals*, XLV (January, 1961).

[5] Luvern L. Cunningham, "Team Teaching: Where Do We Stand?," *Administrator's Notebook*, Vol. VIII, No. 8 (April, 1960).

[6] Robert Hanvey and Morton L. Tenenberg, "University of Chicago Laboratory School, Chicago, Illinois, Evaluates Team Teaching," *Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals*, XLV (January, 1961), pp. 189-98.